The correct language for local publications in East Africa: a qualitative inquiry into subject cataloguing

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Abstract: The linguistic control through controlled vocabulary is aimed at giving users consistent access to information. However, the well intentioned standard, not only disfavours library users, who are incognisant of the prescribed language but also a challenge to the cataloguing staff who are forced to fit the local publications within the prescribed headings under the guise of universal standards. This article presents the results of 11 in-depth interviews conducted with cataloguers from two leading universities in East Africa, supplemented with document reviews and observations. From the evidence collected, adherence to cataloguing standards takes precedence over subject access. Hence, a documented integrated subject approach of controlled vocabulary and local terms was suggested to be augmented by authority control to ease the subject cataloguing process and above all, enhance access local publications.

1. Introduction

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is explicit on the right to know and the freedom of expression which are part and parcel of the normal practice and professional responsibilities of libraries. Additionally, in the bibliographic sector, the International Federation of Library Institutions and Associations (IFLA) statement on libraries and Intellectual Freedom urges libraries to make available the widest variety of materials, reflecting the plurality and diversity of society and to ensure that the selection and availability of library materials and services is governed by professional considerations and not by political, moral and religious views (IFLA 1999).

Libraries uphold the freedom of access and freedom of expression by making decisions on what resources to acquire and through resource description through

classification and subject headings. Thus, shaping the collections and directly impacting on the access of these resources by library users.

The community of users that accesses library collections, depends on the consistency of a series of actions carried out routinely by library staff. The different types of access created are very systematic and allow almost no room for deviation. Historically, libraries have provided access to resources by author, title and subject through cataloguing and classification. There are standards and rules to guide the cataloguing and classification of resources in libraries. Access by subject is created through assignation of subject headings and classification numbers. There are several classification systems adopted by libraries for example: the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) Scheme, the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) Scheme and the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) Scheme. Cataloguing is guided by the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR) till recently, when Resource Description and Access (RDA) was introduced. On the other hand, the subject heading systems in use include the Sears List of Subject Headings, the Library of Congress Subject Heading (LCSH) and various subject thesauri like AGROVOC that covers terminology of all subject fields in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, food and related domains (Agricultural Information Management Standards). The controlled access is but one characteristic that typifies libraries as spaces of control.

In 2013, Drabisinki's exposition into queering the catalogue, stresses the fact that libraries are spaces where language matters hence the resources acquired are linguistically controlled through classification notations and described through standardized terminologies that universalize the library experience. However, the linguistic controls, place restrictions on the user whose search terms may not be available in the authorized cum standardized list of subject headings. Shirky (2005) argues that current standards observe what is referred to as the ontologically and objectively true viewpoint, which fails to accommodate the diversity of cultures, languages and local perspectives of the library users.

 Several scholars have noted disadvantages with the linguistic control in the LCSH as the most widely used subject heading system (Olson (2000). Notable among many is the fact that LCSH are Western oriented, and therefore skewed towards the Western perspective that suppresses the indigenous point of view which marginalizes the local user, who is incognizant of the 'correct language' as prescribed by the 'universal standards. Buckland (1999) contends that unfamiliar vocabulary reduces search effectiveness, hence the importance of adopting terminologies that are user centered.

Olson and Schlegel (2001) have noted that some topics are ghettoized, omitted, inappropriately represented and therefore fail to accurately represent local publications. They specifically attribute omission to a problem of underlying assumptions and cite inaccurate understanding of African languages and

peoples. The end result in both cases, is failure to represent the publications and therefore limit access by subject.

2. Statement of the problem

Libraries are part of the bibliographic sector in society, whose role is to collectively take output of the publishing industry and endeavor to make it accessible to the public (Rubin, 2004). In so doing, they are providing intellectual and physical access to information. In pursuant of this objective, libraries at Makerere University (Uganda) and University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) that hold information resources in their mandate as legal depositories face a great challenge in creating access to these resources, as they have to be originally catalogued because they are uniquely held local publications. Local publications are conceptualized as those materials that are published locally and uniquely held at Makerere University Library, Uganda (Maklib) and University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (UDSMlib) as mandated by Makerere University College (Deposit Library) Act, 1964 and the Legal Deposit Act of 1975 in Tanzania. Local publications play a big role in the cultural life of a locale through the authorship of local authors.

Hence, these are locally authored materials or materials of specific local significance. The understanding is that the local publications reflect in some way the lives of the communities in which they are written or published. In such books, sometimes the author is earmarking the most conventional ideas and alternately, equal importance is accorded to the vernacular. These include but not limited to books, government publications, dissertations and thesis and have one common characteristic of being outside the formal book chain distribution.

More often, these publications are self-published and hence more likely to have no bibliographic information outside the legal depositories. The challenge to the librarian, is in determining the subject terms from the authorized subject vocabulary that is characterized with the Euro-centric nature of the subject headings that do not fully represent African culture, values and customs (Peterson, 2002). As a result, the subject representation of local publications is skewed towards the Western perspective suppressing the indigenous point of view and hence marginalizing library users who should be the center of all cataloguing. Faced with the above challenges, there is inconsistent application of subject headings, defeating the major reason for cataloguing rendering many aspects of African information materials inaccessible and under-utilized. In view of the above, there is critical need to have subject terms culturally relevant and adequately representing local publications. Several studies have looked at the issue of subject access by comparing keywords versus subject headings, but there is scant evidence of the viewpoint from the cataloguing librarians.

3. The Research question

The research questions guiding this study were, how do librarians provide access to local publications? To what extent do the international subject

headings represent the content in local subject headings? The purpose of this study was to examine the subject cataloguing of local publications in universities in East Africa taking a case study of Makerere University and University of Dar es Salaam.

4. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach that employed exploratory and descriptive research questions that were considered appropriate for a qualitative approach as Gay & Airasian (2000) discuss. Qualitative studies allow a personal understanding of the phenomenon and in such studies; the results are likely to contribute valuable knowledge to the community. The valuable community in this study comprised of the librarians who carry out cataloguing operations as their day to day activity. Studying phenomena like subject cataloguing that aims at creating access to resources where there is little known especially from the cataloguer's point of view as far as local publications are concerned.

The researcher employed a case study research design to explore the subject access to local publications and spent ten days with the cataloguers at Makerere University, one of the study sites, observing the cataloguing process of local publications and five days at the University of Dar es Salaam Library. This approach allowed the researcher to study the cataloguing of local publications in the cataloguing departments, the natural setting for cataloguing and also to interact with the users, mostly undertaking research using these particular resources. This enabled the researcher to describe in detail how the different libraries approach the cataloguing of the local information resources and the rationale for the existing cataloguing practices. Descriptive language was used to describe the findings and a narrative style adapted to give a voice to the participants.

The study employed a non-random sampling design. According to Neuman (2011), qualitative studies do not normally require having representative samples but rather a non-probability sample is considered appropriate and hence, one need not determine the sample size in advance. Thus, the study found a non-random sampling design as the intention was not to generalize but delve deeper therefore provide more insight into subject cataloguing of local publications.

11 in-depth interviews were carried out with cataloguing staff. The interviewees included staff charged with cataloguing of local publications at the Makerere University (Uganda) and University of Dar es Salaam. Their level of education varied from certificate to PhD and as indicated in the table below and cataloguing experience from 1.5 to 36 years.

Table 1: Level of Library and Information Education of the Interviewees

University	Certificate	Diploma	Bachelors	Masters	PhD	
UDSM	2	1		1		4
Maklib			4	2	1	7
Total	**2**	**1**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**11**

The two universities were purposely selected as they are both legal depositories and have substantive collections of a local nature. All interviews were conducted face to face between March and May 2012. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed. The interview data was analyzed and coded using the interpretive approach following three stages: data reduction, data categorization and data verification that facilitated the drawing of conclusions.

5. Results and discussion

As evidenced in table two, cataloguing in Maklib is a preserve of professional librarians typically a librarian with a Bachelor's in Library and Information Science (LIS) to a PhD can while in UDSM, it is the Library assistants tasked with cataloguing. Anyone with a qualification below Bachelors in LIS in East Africa is considered a paraprofessional. To understand the context of cataloguing in both universities, one needs to understand that in these two institutions, librarians have academic status but in UDSM librarians also double as teaching staff in the library school, explaining the involvement of library assistants in the cataloguing of library resources. This corroborates with the discussion by Cox and Myers (2010); (Leysen & Boydston, 2005) who argued that it is common to find paraprofessionals in cataloguing leaving the professionals with more intellectual tasks to do. Library of Congress Subject Headings are employed for verbal subject access like in many other libraries all over the world (Hoffman and Gretchen, 2013; Chan, 2005). However, it was observed that the editions varied, as one library used the 30th edition and another used the 15th ed.

How are subjects assigned?
When asked how they go about subject assignation, the respondents indicated that they look at the introduction and/or abstract if provided. However, one cataloguing staff also indicated that at times it was not possible to tell the subject from the introduction and abstract provided in the book especially if the work was in interdisciplinary areas, so the table of contents and submission award were also consulted.

> *I look at the title, read the abstract. I only look at the introduction after I have failed and sometimes, the findings too* - **Cataloguer from Maklib**

> *At times it is not enough to look at the abstract when the book is interdisciplinary, so I even look at the table of contents of even the degree to situate the subject* – **Cataloguer from UDSMLib**

One other cataloguer went on to say that he specifically read the abstract and study objectives in order to come up with what he considered an appropriate subject in cases of thesis and dissertations.

On the question of how many subjects are assigned per work, In UDSMlib, one cataloguer indicated that he assigned an average of five subjects. In Maklib, the average was two subject headings per book . In both libraries, it was indicated that there were no limits to the number of subjects that can be assigned. However, LC practice is that the number of headings varies according to the work being catalogued, in any case not more than ten.

Findings further indicated that the cataloguing staff greatly used the Library of Congress Online Catalogue (LOC) as a bibliographic utility. In Maklib, this was a common occurrence as each cataloguer had a computer unlike in UDSMLib where a computer was shared among the library assistants in the East Africana Section. It has been reported that technology has revolutionised cataloguing but it should be noted that local publications are mostly unavailable in any bibliographic utility and would therefore require original cataloguing. In this case, the role of LOC would be to try and find similar headings but not necessarily a matching record.

In both libraries, there was notable absence of in-house guidelines for subject cataloguing. The interviewees concurred that a lot depended on the individual cataloguer. In cases where there were in house guidelines, they were silent on assignation of subjects.

> *There are no in-house cataloguing rules. I depend on myself.
> I have no one to ask* - **[*Cataloguer, UDSMlib*]**

> *We have a cataloguing manual, but there is nothing on subject
> Headings, none at all.* - **[Cataloguer, Maklib]**

> *We have the subject heading lists, that's it* - **[Cataloguer, Maklib]**

Appropriateness of Subject Headings
Under appropriateness, there were three emerging themes: suitability of headings, inconsistency in local headings and omission of headings.

It is at times hard to get an appropriate subject when the book
　Coverage is local - **[Cataloguer ,UDSMlib]**

It is hard to relate to the language in LCSH... I mean getting the
　Equivalent of the subject content in the red books – **[Cataloguer, Maklib]**

Several times, I get the subject from the head (I improvise) because
　I know such a term is not in the red books

The interviewees indicated that difficult to catalogue cases, were usually put aside working first on publications considered easy. When asked what comprised the difficult cases, the responses zeroed on the failure to find appropriate subjects from LCSH. Emerging from the responses, it was clear that though there were no documented cataloguing guidelines specifically for subject headings, the cataloguing practice was strictly to adhere to LCSH as much as possible as it is considered the standard. This implied that no matter what the subject matter was, an equivalent subject heading had to be found even when it bordered on inappropriateness.

The case in example is the term *Education, Elementary*. Elementary education in the LC context does not adequately communicate *Primary education in* East Africa. However, in strict adherence to LC cataloguing standard, for all local publications on primary education, the subject heading employed was *Education, Elementary*.

Second example, in Tanzania and Uganda there are several tribes and each tribe a dialect, though each country has a specific official language. There is a popular way of spelling each tribe but LC has also another way, 'the standard way'. For that reason, there are a glaring inconsistencies in the terms employed for the same tribe and its dialect. e.g the Banyankore in Uganda speak Runyankole. In LCSH, the heading is
　i.)
　Nyankole language
　　UF　Lunyankole
　　　　Nkole
　　　　Nkore
　　　　Nyankore
And that is acceptable but then cross references with Rukiga language as known in Uganda as follows:
　　　　Chiga language [LCSH] notes the first two syllables and in
　　　　another instance the *Chi* is interchanged with *Ki* in ii. Below

ii.)

Nyan**kore**-**Ki**ga
 UF   Nkore-**Ki**ga language
     Runyankore-Rukiga   (*Compare with* **Lu**nyankole in i. above)
  RT **Chi**ga language

In the absence of local guidelines on subject assignation, such inconsistencies breed confusion among cataloguers and in turn the library users.

On omission, the LCSH were primarily for LC audience (Chan, 2001). Despite its adoption by many libraries all over the world, there has not been sufficient inclusion of issues outside the Western World. e.g. The heading Politics and government is used broadly in both the Tanzanian and Ugandan issues. Many happenings in the political sphere in both countries cannot adequately fit into what LC provides. As already discussed above, the fact that cataloguers strictly adhere to the headings in LCSH list, local politics, ideas, etc. are to a great extent misrepresented as they are seen through a lens that is foreign.

6.   Implications for Libraries
Integration of universal and local cataloguing practice
Librarians should consider integrating 'universal cataloguing practice' with local practice. The meek acceptance of standards is not acceptable for it takes the focus away from the user, for whom access is created. The LC subject cataloguing manual that is religiously followed creates room for local subjects. Ultimately there is need for the cataloguers to re-orient themselves with LC practice in a bid to improve resourced discovery especially in the case of local publications.

Emphasis on authority control
In cataloguing, lies power and control as Miksa (2008) opined. For the librarians who wield this power to realize this status, there is need to critically think through the cataloguing processes. The findings illustrated that the cataloguing staff in one location actually focus more on achieving numbers rather than fostering subject access. In addition, it was revealed that neither of these carried out authority control of any sort. It is not enough to assign subjects, but to go further by creating authority files, the missing link in creating subject access to local publications. Authority control should not be separated from subject cataloguing but should be taken as part and parcel of cataloguing. Streamlining the cataloguing workflow to clearly highlight the additional tasks will lead to effective subject representation of local publications After all, studies still show that the subject search is still one of the most commonly used access points in the online catalogues (Gross and Taylor, 2005).

Development of in-house-cataloguing policies
The finding that there are no in-house cataloguing manuals implies that cataloguers rely on personal judgment in many instances. In cataloguing, there

are powerful pressures to assign subjects according to rules. This dependency resulting from this mode of practice greatly weakens the cataloguers' confidence. This can greatly undermine the cataloguers' ability to influence decisions about subject assignation, more so where library assistants are left in charge of the cataloguing operations. In cases where there is strict adherence of cataloguing rules, leaving almost no room for innovation, is what the researcher would attribute to inadequate preparation of the cataloguing staff either through mentoring or in house guidelines to guide the localization of subject headings. Even if the cataloguing staff were not adequately prepared, in house guidelines would definitely offer adequate guidance in solving complex and not so obvious cataloguing cases.

Collaboration between cataloguers and authors
Collaboration between cataloguers and authors would enrich subject access. Librarians in the East African are not usually experts in subject domains. Therefore, collaborating with the people who have the expertise, in this case authors to contribute subject headings (Alemu et al., 2014), the likelihood that this would contribute to enhanced access is great.

Training of Cataloguers
Cataloguing education needs to be strengthened in library schools. As local publications are largely an original cataloguing affair, there is lot of skill and expertise that is required. Library Schools need to inculcate critical thinking in cataloguer education to equip their students for the workplace. That notwithstanding, there is no amount of training that will have the new cataloguer ready for the workplace, as many routines are localized to a particular library. Hence, the practicing librarians need to help library students with transforming the theoretical skill into actual practice as such, emphasis should be put on internship of new librarians.

7. Conclusions

The subject approach remains a key access point to library collections amidst champions of keyword searching in library systems on the market and so downplaying the need for localised subject headings. Libraries have continued to collect resources that are judged relevant to the needs of the community of users, however, there is a let-down if this is not taken a step further through empowering the user access through appropriate subject headings. The correct language should only be gauged by how user centred it is in view of the library's primary users. The current practice of creating subject access would greatly be enhanced through streamlined workflows that follow clear policies and guidelines that spell out the necessity of user centred cataloguing. Subject authority supplemented with in house thesauruses could be the starting point to a culturally focused information retrieval paradigm and hence, the correct language.

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